

Brighter Than Sunshine

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AU.

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Author's Note: this is for !LUNA! and she deserves something so much better than this thing i wrote in one sitting and in one day but she was so passionate about this AU so here's to hoping she enjoys it at least a little. it's very abrupt and maybe horrible and edited by me and only me, but here's to hoping. happy 4th of july if you celebrate it!

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Saturdays are one of the busiest days of the week for most businesses, especially for the ice cream parlor Percy works at. Saturdays are warm, local kids and parents are cooped up in the house, and many decide to venture out for ice cream. Tourists decide a day of adventure is fitting, and getting ice cream as it's nearing ninety degrees outside isn't a bad idea at all.

He sees as many as three hundred faces every Saturday, maybe even more since he's not exactly known for accuracy with his estimations.

Kilwin's is a well-known ice cream parlor in his area, mostly because you can smell the fudge from fifty feet awayâ€”luring customers in like flies to light. Saturdays are a blur of faces and smiles and listing off ice cream flavors regardless of the labels right there on the glass. There's no reason for him to remember faces, not really, especially since the tourists come once and never return, gallivanting off to their next adventure or returning home after their time off.

The town he lives in is a year-round tourist hot spot. He sees more tourists than he does locals, and while Percy is kind and engaging as he prepares their ice cream cones or cups, he doesn't tend to remember the interactions. As much as he hates to say it, they're mechanical. The small talk is second nature and he usually says the same things every time; has his practiced phrases and little charming words that give the customers a good experience at an unfamiliar place. He hardly ever remembers a face, even if they've managed to visit three and four and five times. It's a miracle he recognizes the mayor when she brings her daughter in every so often, honestly.

So, to put it plainly, it's hard to remember everyone. He doesn't even remember what some of his cousins look like, much less the hundreds of strangers that wander into Kilwin's each day, hoping for the ice cream of their dreams. Kilwin's delivers, of course, or at least Percy's never gotten a complaint from a customer about the taste of the ice cream or the customer service. He likes to think he's good at his job, regardless of the whole never-remembering-a-face thing. His skills include slapping dollops of ice cream on cones and successfully passing them over the counter to customers, not committing every person who orders a plain vanilla cone to memory.

There's no reason he should remember a little kid named Noah, and his only explanation is that the kid asks for dinosaur ice cream, which is by far the oddest request Percy has ever received. The first time it happens, Percy doesn't miss a beat, promising the little guy that their classic chocolate is by far the most dinosaur-like of all flavors in the display. It makes the kid beam excitedly, and the girl that accompanied him offered a relieved smile, like he'd just saved her from a temper tantrum.

They come in again the very next Saturday, and for the first time since he got the job, Percy's able to greet the returning customer by name.

"Hey there, Noah," Percy says, eyeing the line that's forming behind them. He knows that his conversations with customers at the ice cream counter are chaste at best, but it keeps the line moving at a steady pace. Whatever, the walls have enough photos to entertain those in the queue. "Dinosaur ice cream today?"

"I like the T-Rex," Noah says matter-of-factly.

Percy hums, looking down at the tubs of ice cream. "Ah! Here's the T-Rex ice cream!"

Noah bounces up on his tiptoes, hands smearing God knows what all over the glass, trying to peer down at the selections. "Where?!"

Percy gives him a scoop of Fudgie Brownie, leaning down so that he's closer to Noah's height. "You have to keep it a secret, though. Nobody else can know about the dinosaur ice cream."

Noah's eyes are wide as he nods. "I promise. Can I tell Nannabeth?"

Nannabeth, Percy thinks. Probably supposed to be Annabeth. Weird name, but oddly fitting for the girlâ€"assuming that's who Noah's referring to. "Hmm, maybe just this once."

Noah smiles. "Do you have any girl dinosaur ice cream?"

Percy doesn't, since his dinosaur ice cream choices don't really have specific genders, but he chooses the pink one with strawberry chunksâ€"the one he thinks Annabeth ordered last time. "I sure do," he tells Noah, passing Annabeth her ice cream. She smiles a little, and Percy likes to think he made the right choice. "Enjoy, you guys."

"Thank you," they chorus, and before Percy can even return with a 'you're welcome', a group of five are standing at the counter and calling out their orders.

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It's summer, so Percy gets a lot more hours than usual, and there isn't a Saturday on the schedule he won't be working. His managers rave on about how he's one of the best employees they haveâ€"which can't be true, Percy can't even do the dishes without breaking somethingâ€"but he thinks they just like him as a person. He's fun to work with, apparently, and knows how to handle crying children. (Which, honestly, it's not that hard. Hand them an ice cream cone and they're too busy attempting to eat it whole, leaving no time for tears.)

His job is pretty laidback, and he considers himself lucky as far as the location goes. All up and down the street are quaint restaurants and coffee shops, so he always has just what he wants at his fingertips. Not to mention the fact that, if his mom gets off work before he does, she'll bring him candy from the place she works at, just a few doors over. And despite being surrounded by sweets for hours before, Percy still manages to have room for some candy.

It only has to happen three times before Percy realizes that Annabeth and Noah have a routine. They arrive at Kilwin's every Saturday about a half-hour after lunch, always ordering the same ice creams. Now that Noah's had the so-called T-Rex ice cream, he won't eat anything else, and Annabeth seems to have found true love in the Strawberry Chunk. Both are good choices if you ask Percy himself, but he has to say that. It's his job.

"Noah!" Percy greets warmly as the kid enters for the fourth Saturday in a row. Percy would be lying if he said he was half as enthused as his voice sounds, but that, too, is his job. He has to be as sweet as the chocolate fudge and as bright as the lights in the shop. "How are you?"

"Ready for ice cream," Annabeth answers for him. "Or at least he talked about it the entire drive here."

Noah looks at the choices excitedly, but Percy knows it's only a matter of time before he looks up at Percy and quietly asks for the dinosaur ice cream. "I didn't even like ice cream when I was little," he finds himself saying, making Noah frown at him. He laughs at the disgruntled expression on the kid's face. "Don't worry, it was just because the first ice cream I ever had was Rocky Road."

"Someone wanted you to hate it," Annabeth replies. Percy notices she's carrying a backpack today as she hikes it up her shoulder. "Rocky Road is horrible."

"Yeah, it is, though I'm not supposed to down any ice cream flavors we have here," Percy says with a chuckle. "I didn't try ice cream again until I got my job here."

"I bet you were disappointed. You've missed out on a whole lot."

"Excuse me," Noah says. Percy loves well-mannered kids, so he offers Noah his undivided attention. "Can me and Annabeth have _dinosaur_ ice cream?"

He whispers 'dinosaur', keeping the secret under wraps just like Percy asked. "Of course you can. Does Annabeth want dinosaur ice cream?"

"Shh!" Noah exclaims, looking behind him with wide eyes. For once, there's no one behind them. "It's a secret, mister!"

"Right, right," Percy replies, nodding like he's made a grave mistake. "I apologize. And you don't have to call me 'mister'. My name is Percy."

"Annabeth does want dinosaur ice cream, by the way. Preferably strawberry dinosaur ice cream."

"That can be arranged," Percy answers, handing over Noah's cone. After he hands Annabeth's over, she doesn't move towards the register to pay, so Percy's mouth decides to speak. "Uh, feel free to ignore me if this is a really weird question, but what's your relation to Noah?"

"Babysitter," Annabeth replies. "For about three years now, actually."

Percy raises his eyebrows, absently handing Noah a napkin as a few drops of chocolate fall on his hand. "Oh, man, you've watched the little guy grow up haven't you?"

Annabeth grins, ruffling Noah's hair with her free hand. "Yeah, I have. You're a good kid, Noah."

"Thank you," he replies, far too pleased with his ice cream to appreciate the compliment entirely.

"I can tell," Percy says genuinely. "Has good manners; he's a really nice kid."

"I'll tell the parents you said so," Annabeth says with a smile. "We

better get going. Noah has a few more stops he wants to make today."

Percy doesn't mean to hinder her, but it's the longest conversation he's had all day and it's a little refreshing. "Where to, if you guys don't mind me asking?"

Annabeth looks at Noah to see if he wants to answer before she takes care of the question herself. "Well, we're going to walk up and down St. George Street for a while, pick out a birthday present for his mom and probably get some candy before we leave for the movie theatre," she summarizes, shifting her ice cream to her other hand.

"The candy shop? Just a few doors over?" Percy asks.

Annabeth nods. "It's Noah's mother's favorite."

"Ah, well if you see a woman named Sally, tell her I say 'hi,'" Percy tells her with a mischievous smirk. He can already see his mother's fond eye roll in his mind.

"Sure thing," Annabeth replies, probably deciding not to question him. "It was nice talking to you."

"Bye, Percy!" Noah says, half of his ice cream cone on his face. Percy waves goodbye to the two of them, removing the nearly empty butter pecan tub and heading to the back for a fresh one.

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"Soâ€¦| _Annabeth_." His mother smiles like she knows something he doesn't. His mother's a very educated woman, so Percy has a feeling she _does_ know something he doesn't.

"You met her? Did she tell you what I said?" And cue fond eye roll. Percy is a king among men. "I thought you would enjoy that."

"How'd you meet her?" his mother asks, and Percy knows that tone.

"At work. I've talked to her four times, don't get ahead of yourself."

Sally smiles at him. "I'm not getting ahead of anything, Percy. I was just wondering."

"Right, right," he says, rolling his eyes with a grin. "The same way you were 'just wondering' when you asked me about Rachel. And Jane. And Morgan. And Triana. Andâ€¦""

"It's mother's curiosity!" Sally interjects, looking about a second away from flicking her spaghetti at him. "I'm just saying, Annabeth's a nice girlâ€¦""

"Mom," Percy groans.

"â€¦that's all I meant, she just seems kind and wasn't too bad on the eyes eitherâ€¦""

"_Mom!_" Percy says, half-laughing now.

She holds her hands up, a clear white flag. "Alright, alright! I'll stop meddling."

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"So your mom tells me you go to Samara High?"

Percy groans under his breath. _Mothers_, honestly. "I do. What about you?"

"Upcoming senior," she responds. "Oh, um, can I try the Cinnamon Crumb? Dinosaur Cinnamon Crumb, I mean?"

He gets her a sample of it, laughing when she scrunches up her nose. "Nope?"

"Nope," she affirms. "Sticking to dinosaur strawberry. Noah?"

"T-Rex please," he says in a loud whisper that's hardly effective.

"Sure thing," Percy replies, glancing at Annabeth as he gets them their ice cream. "Um, did you just move here?"

"Been babysitting Noah for three years, so I'd say no," Annabeth answers drily. "Why?"

"I don't know, it's just weird that I've never seen you. I'm an upcoming senior, too," he admits. For once, he wishes that he was more attentive.

"Are you in any AP classes?"

"Do I look like I'm in AP classes?" Percy answers, but he guesses Annabeth doesn't know him well enough to make that call. "Nah, I'm not. Why?"

"I'm in all AP. That's why you haven't seen me," she informs him. "I only had, like, five classes at school last year. This year I only have three."

Percy's never known anything besides seven classes a day five days a week since he entered high school. "Well, congratulations on being smart."

She smiles at him for a second, and Percy decides that he could definitely recognize her face by now. "Yeah, thanks. Can't say I've ever been congratulated on that."

Noah tugs at her leg, asking to leave because he feels _so tired_, and Annabeth complies immediately. Percy says farewell with a smile and a "See you next Saturday!"

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"Dude, are you okay?"

"What?"

"Are you okay?"

Percy raises an eyebrow at Axe—"who, if Percy were to call anyone his best friend, would be his first choice"—and says, "Yeah, why?"

"You keep glancing at the door like you want to make a run for it. And I, being the most loving of all friends, brought you _lunch_. Lunch, Percy."

He rolls his eyes at his friend's dramatics. "I appreciate my lunch and am very excited for my lunch break. That's why I'm looking at the door."

"You usually eat lunch in the back."

Percy scowls at his friend. "A door is a door. It represents freedom."

"You failed the test on symbolism," Axe reminds him boredly. Some friendship this is, Percy thinks. "What's up?"

"Nothing is 'up,'" Percy replies, pushing his dark hair out of his face. It's predictably knotted and unable to be tamed. "Just bored. Long day."

Axe doesn't believe him, and if Percy were him, he's not sure he would either. "Right. I'll see you on Friday, yes?"

Percy salutes him. "Jim's at 8:30 P.M., sir yes sir."

"Don't be late," Axe says sternly. Percy's late to nearly everything, but never once has he been late to a gig of Axe's. His friend leaves, somehow having managed to snag a free scoop of ice cream.

It's two o'clock when Percy gets a chance to glance at the time, and it's the first Saturday in almost a month and a half that Annabeth hasn't shown up, leading Noah into the shop by hand. It's weird, feels like his Saturday routine is a little off, but he can't worry too much. Today is apparently the hottest day in ages, so everyone's flocking into the ice cream shop for some icy relief, rendering Percy far too busy to wonder about Noah's absence—and Annabeth's too, of course.

He leaves at five, making room for the night shift, and pokes his head into the candy shop to see if his mom's left yet.

"Looking for Mom?" an older woman asks, probably the owner. Percy's met her a time or two when he stopped by to grab some Jolly Ranchers to make it through the day.

"Yes ma'am. Has she left already, or...?"

"Left around four," she says apologetically. "You two have a good night!"

Percy returns the sentiment, backing out of the doorway and heading for the lot he's parked his car in. In a town like his, especially in this area, there's almost nothing but parking meters to the naked

eye. Percy's a local, though, thank God, and he's learned the little secrets about the town. Which thankfully includes a empty parking lot which allows one to park free of charge, so long as one knows where it's at. It's a little bit of a walk, but Percy enjoys the exercise. Or at least that's what he tells himself.

Once he gets home, Percy can't help but feel like he's forgotten something at Kilwin's, but after reassuring himself by patting his pockets and finding his phone and wallet, he knows that he's just paranoid. And he obviously needed those keys now sitting on his dresser to drive home, so there's not a chance he left them. He puts the thoughts to rest and joins his mother in the living room, placing their bets on who'll win this season of Top Chef.

It takes him three reruns to realize that he's still feeling off from Annabeth and Noah not showing up. He's become used to their momentary conversations, entertaining his two person audience with dinosaur talk. It's silly to feel so disoriented because of it, honestly, since Percy's had life's equivalence of rugs ripped out from beneath his feet, and this occurrence is hardly a child's tug at the metaphorical rug.

It's nothing. Honestly. Just weird that he gave out one less scoop of Fudgie Brownie and Strawberry Chunk today is all.

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Axe's gig isn't big at allâ€”actually, it's quite smaller than the last three he's played. Axe scored some open mic time at a shop on St. George street, the same road Percy and his mother work on. The crowd is composed of tourists and a few frequents, but Axe knows how to play any crowd, just as effortless as he can play a guitar.

Percy stays for the whole half-hour slot, laughing at Axe's jokes and probably cheering the loudest out of anyone, if Axe's embarrassed smile is anything to go by. It's easy to see that the crowd is thoroughly enamored with Axe by the time he's stepping off the small stage.

"Everyone loves you," Percy says, delighted by the crowd's love for Axe. He's seen Axe go from his garage to scoring gigs at bars, opening for bands that have played all over North America, and it's safe to say that he's proud.

"Yeah, they liked me okay," Axe says humbly. "Now take me out to dinner."

It's a testament to their friendship that Percy doesn't even roll his eyes, instead taking them straight to the nearest Taco Bell and buying Axe half the menu.

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"You skipped out on me last Saturday," Percy teases, though admittedly relieved when Noah and Annabeth wander in at their expected arrival time.

"_Someone_ got the flu from his friend Sarah and wasn't allowed out of the house," Annabeth responds, glancing down at Noah, who pouts and sniffles.

"Hey, no worries," Percy says, grinning at Noah brightly. "I'll just give you a little extra today to make up for it."

"Uh, might not be the best idea," Annabeth comments, pursing her lips in apology. "I only have exact change for our usual."

"S fine, just tell Kay to charge me for it," Percy replies, nodding towards the cashier and handing Noah a cone with two scoops. "Besides, little guy was sick. He needs extra dinosaur ice cream."

"Percy's right, Nannabeth. I need extra." Noah nods like he's very educated in the science of extra ice cream scoops, and Annabeth looks far too endeared to say no.

"Of course you can have extra if you want, Noah," she tells him kindly, turning back to Percy. "So, then you don't have to give me extra, only..." Annabeth trails off when Percy hands her a cone with two scoops as well.

"Just take it, Nannabeth! Don't waste the _dinosaur_ ice cream!" Noah tells her, eyes wide.

"Yeah, _Nannabeth_," Percy adds with a grin. "Better listen to the guy."

"At least let me give you the change I have with me. I'll pay you the rest next time." Annabeth starts fumbling through the backpack she's brought with her.

"Annabeth, serious, it's fine," Percy says, waving her off. "It's barely a dollar's difference anyways."

"You don't have to pay," Annabeth replies, her brows furrowing together. "I feel bad."

"That's because you're arguing with me when you could be eating your ice cream. That's enough to bring anyone down," Percy jokes, handing Noah a napkin once again. Annabeth still looks apprehensive, so he rolls his eyes a little. "Hey, go away. Get out of my sight."

"That's no way to treat your non-paying customers," Annabeth replies mildly, just as two people enter a couple, by the looks of it. "I'll pay you back."

"I'll burn the money," Percy says lowly and quickly before calling out a greeting to the couple, now hand in hand and glancing at the variety of fudges they have. Annabeth finally moves to the end of the counter, hopefully relaying the message to Kay. When his co-worker looks over for confirmation, he nods twice to give it.

"What's your opinion on the mint chocolate chip fudge?" a deep voice asks.

Percy turns back to his approaching customers, shrugging his left shoulder. "I'm personally not a fan of mint chocolate chip, but I have tried it. It's pretty rich, definitely not something you'll want to eat all at once or anything, but it has a good flavor to it. Or at

least that's what I've heard from those who like it. I can get you a sample, if you want?"

The couple shares a look before nodding, so Percy gives them small samples to test out the fudge. They leave with two blocks of fudge and some Butter Pecan ice cream to beat the heat outside.

Annabeth and Noah have sat themselves at the lone table in the corner—actually, the only table in the entire shop, much too small to have a proper area for seating, and Percy makes a face at Noah when the kid glances over at him. He giggles, slapping a chocolate covered hand on the table out of delight and Percy decides Noah is probably the cutest kid on the planet. Annabeth glances over her shoulder, but Percy only looks back at her innocently like he hasn't done a single thing. She turns back around.

"Hey, did you know them?" Kay questions, making small talk after Annabeth and Noah have shuffled out the door. "Family or something?"

Percy shakes his head, dishing out three standard vanilla cones for the teen girls in front of him. "Nah, they just come in all the time so I got to know them a little."

"The kid is adorable," Kay says, grin on her face. "I've never seen someone so happy about ice cream."

Which immediately prompts Percy to tell a story from last summer, where a very young girl had actually screeched in delight upon receiving her very first ice cream cone, babbling on about it the whole time her family was in the shop.

Kay and Percy carry on sharing their stories from previous jobs and their current one, eventually branching out to other topics. He learns that Kay's real name is Kelsi, even if she prefers the nickname Kay, that she started college a year early thanks to some advanced program, and that she has an infatuation with some guy that busks around their town, claiming that he's the best she's heard in the entire city.

His mom brings home a pizza for dinner, not feeling up to cooking after working late, and Percy gets to choose the movie for that night. It's a great day.

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On Tuesday, Kilwin's replaces their three least popular flavors with three new ones for a test run. If they sell well, the shop promises to keep them. If they're even less popular than the three prior, they'll revert back to defaults. Percy doesn't think it's a bad idea at all.

However, when he sees the titles of the ice cream and sees a new label that says 'Dinosaur Crunch', he's anticipating Saturday, where he'll be able to point it out to Noah. First, though—first Percy needs to taste test it. For logical reasons, of course, and definitely not because the ice cream is blue and Percy enjoys blue foods more than he should.

The ice cream is to die for. Percy contemplates getting another

'sample' of it, in the form of a nine scoop ice cream cone, but a woman steps up to the counter before he can.

The new flavors attract a fair amount of attention, especially from a few customers who are trying their hardest to stick to their diets, even on vacation. They have a new option that has less sugar than any other choice they have, along with real fruit, and the customers who ask for it seem to enjoy it well enough. The other flavor is something about Spiderman, which Percy knows kids will love to buy, if only for the name of it.

When he leaves work that day, he takes a cone of Dinosaur Crunch with him. God, he feels like he could finish off their entire supply before Saturday even rolls around, it's so good. And it's blue, his favorite color. Percy cannot understand why he hasn't been introduced to this flavor before.

By the time it's Saturday, management's decided that there's no way they'll be able to get rid of the new flavors, since they've become a crowd favorite in the blink of an eye. Percy's glad, since this means Noah will definitely get to try the actual dinosaur ice cream, and Percy'll admit itâ€”he wants to see the kid's reaction.

Percy's radiating all kinds of excited energy when Noah bounds into the shop, frowning at the line that they've managed to escape almost every time they visit. Annabeth stumbles in not a moment behind, catching her breath, and Percy realizes that they'd been racing, which is justâ€¦ Good babysitting. Annabeth is a great babysitter. If Percy were a child, he would want Annabeth to babysit him.

He move a little quicker than usual, if only to get rid of the line so that he can show Noah their new flavor. He keeps glancing at them over the shoulders of the people currently ordering, and Annabeth gives him a confused smile when she catches his eye for the third time.

Once they finally, finally make it up to the counter, Percy's grinning widely. "Noah, guess what?"

The kid seems to absorb a large portion of Percy's excitement. "What?"

"We have three new flavors," Percy starts, already getting out one of the cups for samples, "and I have one I think you're gonna like."

Annabeth leans back a little to read the labels, then bites down a smile, offering a oddly cute thumbs up when Percy sees her smile.

"What is it?" Noah asks, already making grabby hands for the cup in Percy's hand, which has a small portion of the light blue ice cream in it.

"Try it first," Annabeth suggests, sharing a look with Percy.

Noah tries it, eating the entire sample without even breathing, probably. "That was yummy. What is it?"

"Dinosaur Crunch," Percy announces proudly, laughing when Noah's jaw

drops.

"Likeâ€¦ _Real_ dinosaurs?"

Percy's not sure what that means, but he nods anyways. "Real dinosaurs. It even says it on the label."

"I want a million of it!" Noah nearly shouts, tugging at Annabeth's shirt. "Nannabeth, did you hear Percy? _Dinosaurs_!"

"I heard," Annabeth replies with a smile. "He'll take one for now, though."

"Yes ma'am," Percy says, grabbing two cones and putting the largest single scoop he can manage on Noah's. "What would you like today?"

"I'm gonna stick with my strawberries," she decides, after a long moment. "One day I'll get the nerve to try the apple one."

"So you're a fan of fruit, I take it?" Percy asks, and he should get an award for the world's most awkward small talk. _Fruit_, of all things.

"Yeah," Annabeth replies, tone implying that she's thinking the same thing Percy is. "Fruit's great. Reallyâ€¦"

"Fruity," Percy suggests with a firm nod, serious expression on his face. "As fruit should be."

"Right," Annabeth says, smiling like she's three seconds away from bursting into laughter. "Oh, I have the money I owe you, by the wayâ€¦"

"Nannabeth, Percy already told you not to bring the money," Noah informs her wisely, drops of light blue on his shirt from the ice cream. "I think you should listen to Percy. He's very nice."

Percy gives her a look. "Noah's pretty smart, Nannabeth. I'd hear him out."

"Don't you 'Nannabeth' me," she says, about as fiercely as possible while in a shop that radiates happiness and smells like Christmas morning every morning. Percy's smile widens. "I feel bad for making you pay for it. I'm taking your money."

"I offered my money. Stop arguing with me!" Percy laughs a little, waving her along. "I have customers, Annabeth, leave me be!"

She does leave him be, paying for her and Noah's treats this time before leaving. Before the door closes behind her she turns, waving goodbye with a small smile when he looks her way. Percy waves back, dropping his hand down to rest on his chest once she leaves. Percy's having trouble remembering why Noah caught his eye before Annabeth did.

"I saw that," Kay mutters under her breath when she moves past him, elbowing him gently in the back. "I _so_ saw that."

"You saw nothing. There was nothing to see," Percy answers, far too

quickly and breezily to be the truth.

Kay squints at him. "I'm watching you, Jackson. Watching you watching her, anyways." She cackles like that might be her joke of the century. Percy is entirely unamused by it.

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From that Saturday onward, Noah refuses to have anything besides Dinosaur Crunch. Percy had a feeling that would happen.

Three Saturdays after Noah's discovery that Dinosaur Crunch is heaven on Earth, Annabeth enters the shop alone. Percy's convinced that Noah'll stumble in right behind her, but even after he's served the few people in front of Annabeth, the kid still hasn't made an appearance. "No Noah?" Percy asks, looking over her shoulder like he'll materialize out of thin air.

"No Noah," Annabeth confirms. "His parents usually work Saturdays, but they both took today off. It's his birthday," she explains, gesturing vaguely. "So they're going to take him to some theme park and spend the day with him."

"That's nice." Percy clears his throat, suddenly thick, because it was always a lot easier talking to Annabeth when Noah was there to keep things light. "Uh, did you want something?"

"Ice cream, if that's not a problem?"

"Noâ€"I. I knew you wanted the ice cream, I meantâ€"like, I was asking what youâ€" He trails off, and Annabeth lifts one eyebrow, looking too amused for her own good. "What flavor of ice cream can I get for you?"

"I'd like to try the apple thing over here," Annabeth says, tapping the glass. "And if I hate that, I want to try this raspberry one. And if I hate that, I'm getting strawberry again."

"You've been planning," Percy teases, getting her samples of both the raspberry and apple ice creams. Annabeth tests the apple, then shakes her head and winces, handing it back to him. "No?"

"No, no. Never again. I have no luck with new flavors, do I?" Despite the truth to that statement, she tries the raspberry anyways. "Looks like it's strawberry, then."

Percy smiles a little, throwing the remains of her samples away. "Strawberry Chunk's always a good way to go."

"Speaking of good restaurants in the area," Annabeth starts abruptly, even if no good restaurants had been mentioned in the sentences prior, "what's a good place? Because I'm out here all day, probably, shopping around for some cousins coming to visit next week, and I'm going to need some food if I'm gonna brave the crowds."

"Al's Pizza is my favorite," Percy replies, "since, you know. Pizza. But it's usually really crowded around lunch time. There's actually this really good cafe a few streets over, butâ€" ah, sorry, don't really know the name of it. I have the image in my head, but I have no clue what it's called." He glances at the clock, biting the

inside of his cheek. "I can actually take my break in about ten minutes, if you want me to walk you over?"

"Oh, you don't have to do that," Annabeth says, but Percy's waving her off before she can even complete the sentence.

"Really, it's fine, I've been meaning to take my mom there anyways. I'll actually look at the name this time." Annabeth moves out of the way as a family of four come in, oohing and ahing over the choices of fudge and candies. "Give me ten minutes."

Annabeth gives him a grateful smile, making a beeline for the table in the corner. The family of four get quite a few different flavors, each opting for double-scooped and waffle cones. Before he heads to the back to clock out, letting Jason man the front, he sees the dad taking a picture of his family with their ice cream.

He forgets to take his apron off before he exits the employee lounge, so he just decides to wear it anyways. Annabeth's finished her ice cream in the allotted time, spinning her phone idly on the table while she waits. He knocks on the table like he would knock on a front door, and Annabeth laughs at him before she stands up, too.

"You're still in your apron," she points out.

"I am," Percy agrees. "I figure I could get in some advertising while I walk down the streets," he lies, deciding not to admit that he was so anxious to speak with Annabeth that he neglected to untie it and place it on one of the hooks available.

"So, where exactly is this place?"

Percy knows it's on Aviles Street, or at least he's pretty sure, so he starts in that general direction. It'll be pretty embarrassing if he's wrong, but he's trusting the fact that he's grown up on these streets to guide him to the right place. "I know it's under a mile away," he says decisively. "But that's all I know."

"Just don't get us lost. I'm starving," Annabeth replies, seemingly unconcerned that Percy doesn't really know where he's going. "If all else fails we'll just ask around."

Percy nods in acknowledgement. "Soâ€¦ Cousins?"

"Yeah, three of them just had their birthday's recently and I can't buy gifts for three and not for the other two, so I figured I could just buy them all something. Like a welcoming gift, or something."

"That's nice of you," Percy says considerably, waiting for a car to move before crossing the street, Annabeth keeping pace with him. "How long are they staying for?"

"Only two weeks. My cousin Celia's actually having her honeymoon here, so everyone else in the family decided to make the trip down from Michigan, too." Annabeth shrugs. "We don't see our family as much as we should, I think? My parents are researchers, working from home, so they're busy a lot of the time and forget to keep up with family."

Percy likes getting to know Annabeth a little bit more. "That's cool that you'll be able to see them now," he comments, rounding a corner. It's coming back to him now, and he's positive that this place is on Aviles Street. "I don't really have a lot of family around here, and they don't usually make the trip down to see us."

Annabeth turns to him. "Why not?"

It's a very plain question, but sadly Percy doesn't have an answer. "Not really sure. It's just been me and my mom for so long I never really, like, thought about how everyone else was doing? Plus, my mom was an only child, so it's not like I have all these uncles and aunts I'm ignoring. Most of my family is just distant cousins who don't even have the same last name and all that."

"You don't sound upset," Annabeth says, but it doesn't sound judgemental, only contemplative.

Percy shrugs a little. "I'm not, not really. I love my mom and I'm used to it being just us, so it's never really bothered me." Percy squints at the street sign, a few meters away. "Oh, there's Aviles Street. I'm pretty sure it's off here, let's seeâ€|"

La Herencia Cafe. Percy commits that to memory. "This it?" Annabeth asks.

"Sure is," Percy affirms. "Right, so I need to get back, butâ€"

"Wait, isn't this your lunch break?"

And Annabeth's here, which means it's close enough to noon, so yes, actually, it is his lunch break. The walk itself had only taken about five minutes, being much closer than Percy had estimated, giving him about twenty minutes to eat if he wants to be back in time. "I guess it is," he answers, after a too-long pause.

"Sorry, Iâ€|" Annabeth shakes her head, moving her hand to push her hair out of her face before realizing that it's up in a bun. She drops her hand. "Do you want to get lunch?"

Percy can feel his lips twitch, dying to smile, but he holds his own. "Are you asking me out?"

"I'm asking you to eat with me," Annabeth says flatly. "Don't be presumptuous." She's smiling a little, too, so Percy knows better than to think she's being rude. "And besides, I need to pay you back for that one day you bought me and Noah ice cream, so it'll be lunch on me. Assuming you didn't bring your wallet."

Percy didn't bring his wallet, but he can't resist saying, "You're paying for me? And asking me to join you for lunch? I don't know, Nannabeth, sounds like you might be asking me out." He likes girls that take initiative, mostly because he's too shy and lazy to do it himself. He can banter all day, though granted he'll definitely stutter at some point or come to a loss for words, but there's only been two times in his life that he's asked a girl out. The first time was in kindergarten before he lost the brashness, and the second time he was asking his mother to go out to dinner with him in celebration

of his first paycheck. He thinks that neither really count.

"Percy," Annabeth says, huffing. "You can either come inside with me and get a free lunch, or you can sit out here all day pretending I just asked you on a date."

"Can I come inside, get the free lunch, and pretend you asked me on a date?" Percy's a little proud of that comeback. This should go down in history as Percy's absolute smoothest moment.

Annabeth, despite herself, laughs. Instead of a reply, she turns on her heel and enters the cafe.

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It was totally a date.

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The following Saturday, Annabeth enters with Noah in tow. The kid apologizes three times for not being there last Saturday: once when he first sees Percy, again when he gets his ice cream, and a final time before he leaves. It's probably the cutest thing Percy's seen in a while.

Well, the cutest thing a kid's done. Annabeth gave him another one of those weird thumbs-up things as they left, and he's decided those are pretty adorable, too.

Suddenly, Percy's a little sad Annabeth only comes in on Saturdays. His appetite for Annabeth's company has increased tenfold, even if he knows she's probably busy entertaining her cousins while they're in town and babysitting Noah on the side. She was nice to be around, is the thing, and their conversation was easygoing and lighthearted when they sat down for lunch. Percy's not sure that he's had a conversation that good in years, if he has to tell the truth.

"Hey, stop with those heart eyes, Jackson," Kay teases from her place at the register, after Annabeth's left.

"Probably no different than you and the guy who sings on the streets," Percy says back, sticking out his tongue childishly. "Have you guys even made contact?"

"Shut up!" Kay says, but she's laughing, too. "There's no way I'd be able to talk to him."

Percy's not blind; Kay's a very pretty girl. She might not be his typeâ€"in fact, Percy feels nothing but sisterly affection for herâ€"but he can tell she's the kind of girl people double take when they see her. "What days does he play?"

"I don't think he has a schedule," Kay says sadly. "It's like, sometimes I see him around, down there in front of Earthbound, but it's never on certain days or at certain times. It's like he just goes when he wants. Like a free spirit, or something, which is so admirable if you ask me."

"You like him," Percy sing-songs, moving to poke at Kay's shoulder. "'Free spirit', 'admirable'... That's gross," Kay. You should talk

to him!"

"Nope," she replies firmly, smiling as a woman approaches the counter with a stack of fudge and a pre-made gift basket.

Percy backs away, knowing that they'll continue the conversation later and he'll be her wingman so she can get the attention of this guy she's practically in love with, but for now he's got a few folks crowding at his ice cream counter, so he'll take care of that first.

As he's dropping a scoop of mint chocolate chip on a waffle cone for the woman in front of him, he hears the door open. He glances up to see Axe, swinging a plastic bag in hand, which is hopefully Percy's lunch. His best friend is a saint.

While he's waiting for the woman's child to pick a flavor, he mouths 'I love you' to Axe, who rolls his eyes and sits at the table in the corner. Whichâ€"that's the table Percy's started to think of as Annabeth's and Noah's, so it's a little weird to see another person sitting at it.

Eventually he gets rid of his line and rushes to clock outâ€"he's _starved_.

Kay follows him into the back, which makes Percy frown. "You just had your lunch break," he points out, because she follows him all the way to the room they clock in at.

"That's him!" Kay says, sounding panicked. "The guy that sings, he's in there right now!"

The only person in Kilwin's is Axe, unless Percy seriously missed a whole human body.

And thenâ€"it dawns on him. _Axe_ sings, of fucking course, and Earthbound is one of his favorite stores on St. George Street. "Oh my god," Percy blurts as he clocks out, feeling oddly close to laughter. "_That's_ who you were talking about?"

The bells on the door jingle, alerting them that another person entered the ice cream shop. "What? You know him?"

Percy shakes his head, _really_ laughing now. "Kay, that's my best friend. Axe."

"Axe," she repeats, blankly. "Oh, that's so cute, what the fuckâ€" "

"No cursing! You have customers!" He pushes Kay out of the back room and up to her register, moving from behind the counter so he can finally eat his lunch.

Axe looks up as Percy approaches, pushing the styrofoam box over to him. "It's just some Italian food from that one cafe. The name I can't pronounce."

"Thanks, man," Percy says, digging right in. After he's shoved a fair amount of pasta in his mouth, he casually starts with, "So, see the girl at the counter?"

"You mean the only girl in here? No, just so happened to miss the only other human life form in our presence, how silly of me," Axe replies, with hardly any inflection, but he glances over to her anyways. "Yeah, what about her?"

"Her name's Kay," Percy continues.

"She looks familiar. Does she go to school with us or something?"

Percy's not actually sure what the answer to that question is, since Kay started working here not too long ago and they haven't gotten to the topic of high school just yet. "You've probably seen her around while you're busking. She's a fan, kind of."

Axe perks up immediately, giving her another glance. "A fan?"

"Of your singing and your face," Percy replies, eloquent as ever.

At that, Axe sinks back into his normal slouch and rolls his eyes. "Yeah, whatever. Actually thought I had a fan for once, thanks for that."

Percy frowns. "I'm not lying."

"I believed you until the thing about my face. Like, honestly Percy, if you're going to lie to someone you need to make it believableâ€" "

"Why is it so unbelievable that someone thinks you're attractive?" Sure, Percy's seen Axe display insecurity here and there, a disbelieving snort or an eye roll when Percy's offered compliments about his music or his appearance, but he's never heard him speak quite so bluntly.

"Dude," Axe says, lowering his voice and glancing at Kay _again_. "She's likeâ€" There's no way. Like. Out of my league. Times ten."

"Out of yourâ€" _what?_" Percy drops his plastic fork in protest. "You literally have a song called 'The Sky is the Limit.'"

Axe gives Percy a glare. "That song is about actions, not pretty girls, you idiot."

Percy stares him down. "You're the idiot."

"I brought you lunch!"

"That has no effect on your smartness," Percy informs him, closing the lid of the styrofoam to-go box and placing it back in the bag. "I wasn't lying. She's a fan."

"Of the music? Maybe. But don't stretch it." Axe stretches boredly, standing as Percy does.

"You playing tonight around here?"

"Figured I might. Why?"

"At Earthbound?"

"Yeah, sure, if I must." Axe raises an eyebrow. "Why?"

"Nothing. Bye, thanks for lunch, love you man!" He smiles at his best friend's skepticism, tossing the trash in a can and heading to the back to clock in once again. Once he returns to the front, Kay moves from her place by the ice cream to her register once more, cheeks a little too red to be just make-up.

"How was lunch?" she asks weakly.

"Axe is playing tonight," Percy says, ignoring her question. "In front of Earthbound. You should go, if you want."

"How do you know he's playing?" Kay wonders, eyes wide.

"Iâ€¦ I just asked him, Kay," Percy replies, as lightly as he can manage. He forgets that Axe can be a little blinding to some; a little too cool with the streak in his hair and piercing in his bottom lip and with a voice that makes most wonder why he hasn't got a record deal already. "You should go."

"Iâ€¦ Might." She nods to herself. "I can't believe you know him. This is embarrassing. I've said so much about himâ€¦"

"Hey, I can keep a secret," Percy tells her, punching her shoulder lightly. "I'm not gonna go and tell him every word you said. As long as you aren't secretly Annabeth's best friend, or something."

They clock out at five, and Kay heads in the direction of Earthbound instead of the parking lot. Percy smiles to himself the whole ride home.

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Axe starts showing up at Kilwin's a lot more than usual, and Percy has a feeling that he's not the reason.

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"Honestly, just try it," Percy says, handing Annabeth a sample of their Butter Pecan ice cream. "It's really normal."

She tries it, but still shakes her head. "I'm sorry, I'm just too attached to my Strawberry Chunk. Nothing is measuring up."

Percy rolls his eyes, but it's also a little cute how Annabeth latches onto things like that. He might want to be one of those things she latches onto.

"Strawberry Chunk it is," he declares, grinning at Annabeth. "So, Noah, I'm guessing you still want your usual Dinosaur Crunch?"

"Hmâ€¦" Noah hums, attempting to pull a label off the glass. If it were any other kid, Percy would scold them, but it's Noah. "Do you have any pirate ice creams?"

Percy raises both eyebrows. "No dinosaurs?"

"I like pirates now," Noah says, matter-of-factly.

He thought he would never see the day. "When did this happen?"

"We might have watched a few episode of Jake and the Pirates this morning," Annabeth says with a shrug. "Guess he's moved on."

"What do you think is the most pirate-y, Annabeth? Pirate Chocolate Peanut Butter or Pirate Cookies and Cream?" Percy asks, pursing his lips in careful consideration.

"I'm gonna go with the first one," Annabeth says, after a few seconds.

"Then Pirate Chocolate Peanut Butter it'll be for Noah," Percy proclaims, sliding the window to the left so he can reach it.

Noah licks it carefully, nodding in approval. "This is pirate ice cream."

"Yes it is," Percy says, giving him a look. "Remember our talk? It's a secret. We can't have everyone knowing that pirates made this ice cream!"

Noah swears up and down that he'll never tell a soul, and Annabeth gives Percy a grateful smile. "We'll get out of your hair. See you later?"

"If you wanted a second date all you had to do was ask, Annabeth," Percy says, trying to sound flirty and teasing and cool, but coming out more breathless and questioning and confused instead. Swell.

She rolls her eyes, but she doesn't say no, which he guesses is the important thing. "Right. I'll get back to you on that one."

Even from his place at the other end of the counter, Percy can hear Noah saying 'Date?' over and over, trying to ask Annabeth what exactly that means. He can also see the way Annabeth's cheeks get a little pinker each time he says it, like the 'ignore it and it'll stop' thing works with toddlers. She should know better.

Noah decides to seek information from other sources, leaving Annabeth's side to approach him again. "What's a 'date,' Percy?"

Annabeth's too busy searching through her wallet to hear his answer, so Percy shrugs at Noah. "It means I like Nannabeth," he says, after deciding it was the simplest way to put things.

"You like Nannabeth?" Noah asks, scowling at him. "Like you're gonna marry her?"

Percy thinks that a little soon, but Noah's getting the general concept. "Yeah, sure, why not," he answers.

"Noah, we have to go, say goodbye," Annabeth says, walking over to them. "We're going to be late for our movie."

"Percy wants to marry you," Noah informs her proudly. "And he told me what a date was when you wouldn't."

Whichâ€"well, Noah not saying that first bit would have been preferable, but he'll take what he can get. Percy deserves that, probably, and he definitely deserves the way he ends up blushing wildly. Damn his blood vessels. Oh, toddlers. Little bundles of joy, they are.

Annabeth sputters for a second, sending Percy a sideways glance and clearing her throat. She almost looks a little shy, actually, and if that's not adorable Percy doesn't know what is. "And what's a date, Noah?"

"It means he likes you," Noah says, all smug about his new knowledge. "Like he's gonna marry you."

"That'sâ€"I tried to, um, put it plainly for him. He mentioned the marrying thing. Notâ€"That wasn't me. I. Sorry, you're late, you should go, soâ€" He trails off dumbly, letting his hands fall as deadweight onto the counter, cheeks feeling no less hot.

"One date in and you're thinking marriage," Annabeth says, rolling her eyes like she shouldn't have expected anything else. She has strawberry ice cream on her bottom lip. Percy wonders if he's died and this is some very, very weird part of heaven.

But, waitâ€""So it was a date!" Percy shouts triumphantly, loud enough to gain Kay's attention, anyways. "I knew it. Oh, I knew it, you tried to lie, but I knewâ€""

"We're late," Annabeth repeats, pulling Noah by the hand towards the door. "Bye, Percy."

"Bye, Percy!" Noah echoes, nibbling at the top of the cone, having already devoured all the ice cream.

"Date?" Kay asks from her place at the register. "There was a date, and you didn't evenâ€""

"Like you and Axe aren't being all"â€"Percy gestures vaguely, noticing a man approaching his counterâ€""so you have no room to talk to me like that. Hi, can I help you sir?"

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The next time Annabeth comes in, it's not Saturday.

He has half a mind to hide in the back until she leaves, since he can leave for good in about five minutes anyways, but Annabeth sees him before he can make his escape. "It's not Saturday," is what he ends up blurting as soon as she's in front of him.

"Oh, is it not? Wow, I've just royally messed up, looks like I'll just leave and come back on Saturday," Annabeth says, eight different kinds of sarcastic. "Honestly. I should have known. We physically cannot talk to each other unless it's a Saturday."

Percy doesn't want to, but he laughs anyways. "I wasâ€"kidding. I do that. Iâ€" Kid. Is that the right phrasing? Is kid a verb?"

Annabeth blinks at him, that same amused expression crossing her face. "You want to talk about verbs, of all things?"

And cue the blushing—"wait, nope, Percy's been doing that since the moment Annabeth walked in. "We don't have to," he says, after a few seconds. "And we can talk. Even if it's Wednesday."

"Well, thank God, I'd hate to think my drive was all for nothing."

"Did you want some ice cream, or—?"

Annabeth rolls her shoulders like she's considering it, but in the end she shakes her head. "I'm good, actually."

Percy's at a loss. "Then, um— Why are you— here?"

"To teach you how to speak properly," she says drily, smiling. Percy has a feeling she enjoys pointing out how nervous he is. "Word is you're off the clock soon?"

He bites his lip, staring down at the counter and trying not to smile too widely. "I might be. How did you know?"

"I have my sources." He rolls his eyes at that, but it loses its effect since he's still facing the counter. "It's five o'clock. Go clock out."

"Don't tell me what to do," he mutters petulantly, like he's Noah's age instead of seventeen going on eighteen. He clocks out, leaves his apron on the hook, and grabs his keys from the small locker he's allowed as an employee. "Where are we going?" he asks, once he's on the other side of the counter beside Annabeth.

"To dinner and a movie. You're paying for one and I'm paying for the other," Annabeth carries on, like she's already planned this out. "We're seeing the new Transformers movie at 6:45, so we'll have plenty of time to eat. I figured we'd go to La Herencia? Unless you'd prefer something else, of course. Which do you want to pay for?" Percy bites his tongue so that he doesn't smile like a lunatic. "Percy?"

"You planned our date," he says, after a few seconds. His heart is hammering in his chest; he might be three seconds away from needing a medic.

"Well, one of us has to, and you're too busy saying the word 'date' to actually plan it," she responds with an eyeroll, half-heartedly slapping his shoulder with her hand. They start for the cafe, without having properly discussed the restaurant of choice. Percy doesn't know what to do with his hands because he's far too nervous to take a risk and hold hers.

Thankfully, by the time they've made it to the cafe, Percy's gotten his jitters down to a manageable level. Annabeth seems so collected and composed, and Percy would find it admirable if he wasn't so envious of the qualities.

Once they've seated themselves and ordered their food, Percy can't

stop the way his leg bounces up and down. He likes the cafe a lot; likes the way it seems to have preserved a sense of quaintness, much like the rest of the places around St. George Street have. It's a nice place to have a meal at. And their food is great, really, one of the best he's had around here. Nice menus. Cute tablecloths. Comfortable seats.

He hears Annabeth laugh, so he directs his attention away from the wall to look at her. "What?" he questions.

"Are you just going to look at the wall the whole time, or do you want to have a conversation?"

The way she talks to him—"it's like, it really, really pisses him off, but he also finds it really attractive. He's so confused with himself, so instead of wondering about attraction and just how that works, he swallows to get rid of the dryness of his throat. "We can talk."

Annabeth blinks when he doesn't continue. "You do realize—"

"How was it? With your cousins?" Percy interrupts, because if he didn't say it right then he would have never said it.

She smiles. "It was nice to see them again, but I'll admit I was glad when they left. It was kind of a lot to babysit Noah for a few hours, only to come home to a house full of loud kids who need taking care of, too. But they were a lot of fun to have around; like we all came down here one day. We even went to Kilwin's, but you weren't working, and I had a conversation with your friend Jason—"he was nice. He told me what time you got off today."

Percy will have to thank Jason a million times over. "Yeah, Jason's a good guy."

Annabeth nods, staring at Percy. He looks away, searching for a new distraction so that he doesn't keel over or pass out or break out in hives—"but then there's something nudging at his foot. For a very scary and illogical moment, Percy thinks it's a shark, and then he realizes that he's in a cafe, and there are no sharks here, and that's just Annabeth's foot. He looks up at her again.

"How are you?" she asks, adding some pressure to her nudging. Percy nudges back. Annabeth smiles.

"I'm good," he breathes out, taking a sip of his water the second their waiter drops it off. He turns it in circles. "How are you?"

"A lot less nervous than you are, evidently. That's a relief."

He wants to glare at her, but he ends up laughing. "Sorry, I—"I'm, like, one of those people who are really good at imagining perfect scenarios in their head, but when actually trying to perform them I just—" Do not do well. Imaginary me is a lot cooler."

"Hey, you're plenty cool," Annabeth says. Percy gives her a look. "Okay, so maybe not. But that's okay!"

And, before he can even consider doing otherwise, Percy's head is falling back and he just can't stop laughing. It's not long before

Annabeth joins in, ice sufficiently broken, and Percy's leg decides it doesn't need to shake violently.

So they might play footsies a little all throughout dinner. It's whatever, really.

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Annabeth was smart when she chose for them to see a movie, because that meant that there wasn't a need for conversation—something Percy is apparently incapable of doing successfully when nervous. Though, there was a flaw in her choice of movie, because Percy's only seen the first Transformers film. It was cool, but he'd never gotten around to seeing the rest of them. Annabeth's interested, though, leaning forward when the plot thickens and falling back into her seat when something impactful is said; laughing at the jokes and grinning when it gets good.

She's probably the cutest movie-watcher in the world, and really, Percy might actually need that same medic, because his brain is saying funny things. He tries to pay attention, but Annabeth's smile is somewhat more interesting than the plot of the movie—which is top-notch, making Percy wish he knew more about the films preceding it.

Once the movie ends, before the lights have even been turned on again, Annabeth faces him with a knowing look. "You couldn't have cared less about that movie, am I right?"

"Maybe a little," Percy allows, immediately rushing to reassure her when she looks away, pursing her lips. "But it's only because I haven't seen the other ones, only the first one! And besides, this is great, because it's already given us an idea for Date Number 3. We can watch the other Transformers movies together and then I'll appreciate this movie a lot more."

Annabeth nods, but still looks remorseful, watching the credits like she's being paid to do so. He pinches his knee and darts forward to kiss her cheek before he lets go. "It's fine," he breathes out, a little lightheaded. Annabeth's skin is soft and Percy is melting just like the ice cream he's always surrounded by. "Really, I had a great time."

"Really?" Annabeth says, sounding small for the first time since he's met her.

"Really," he assures her. The credits are still rolling, people clearing out all around them. "Like, a really, really great time. Just being, like, next to you was nice. I swear."

Annabeth stares at him for a second before she nods. "If you say so."

"I do say so. Don't feel bad about it, please, we haven't even talked about movies before so I didn't expect you to know."

"You could have said something," Annabeth points out, scowling at him.

"You had already bought the tickets!" Percy chuckles, knocking his

shoulder against hers. "I had fun, don't be upset."

Annabeth nods, but still twists her hands together. "I just don't like being wrong. Like, I picked this movie because I had no clue what you were really into, but I figured you wouldn't care for Maleficent, which was the only other film in our time block, soâ€" "

Percy hesitates for only a brief moment before he drops a hand on her knee. He can do this. He can touch pretty girls without passing out. "Relax. It was perfect."

Annabeth looks down at his hand. "You're just saying that, but I appreciate the niceness and all." He squeezes her knee, hoping that communicates how wrong he thinks she is. "We should go."

"Or," Percy says, removing his hand and standing up from his seat, "we could movie hop. Because let me tell you, Annabeth, I've been dying to see How To Train Your Dragon 2, and one of these screens has to be playing it."

"Movie hop," she says slowly. "Isn't that against the rules?"

"It most definitely is. But you could use some good rule breaking every now and then," Percy says, helping her up. "Besides, rules are made to be broken. Now, come on, maybe we can find one that's just started."

When they find a screen playing it, the movie's about fifteen minutes in. Percy's doubting that they'll get a better deal than that, though, so he drags Annabeth in by her wrist and walks her to the first two available and consecutive seats. It's probably the worst view in the entire room, but Annabeth's links their hands together, so he survives.

This movie is something they both enjoy and Percyâ€"like any other sane humanâ€"loves a good animated movie. Every time he and Annabeth laugh at the same time, Percy holds her hand that much tighter. He's just happy around herâ€"even if she radiates sarcasm rather than joy and rolls her eyes more than she blinks them.

The first time Hiccup and Astrid do something unbearably cute, Annabeth pushes her smiling face against his shoulder, and Percy's endeared beyond wordsâ€"literally. He just stares at her with what probably looks like a pained expression because he's never liked someone even a _quarter_ as much as he likes Annabeth.

"Movie hopping is a good thing," she decides, once they're leaving the theatre and heading for their cars. "A very, very good thing."

Percy smiles, swinging their hands a littleâ€"mostly because he's just a little happy he's getting to hold her hand. "Breaking rules can be good."

"But not usually," Annabeth responds. "I was so nervous when we were looking for a theatre to go into. I hate getting in trouble."

Hates getting in trouble, hates being wrong, Percy lists inwardly. Both are things he can live with. At least she likes ice cream,

anyways, and that's what's most important. "I get in trouble all the time. You'll hate being around me."

Annabeth hums. "It's already Date Number Two. There's no going back now. I mean, first date was marriage, so I can't imagine how locked down I am now."

Percy groans a little, but ends up laughing along with her instead. "I can't believe Noah went and told you about our guy-to-guy conversation."

"He's six," Annabeth reminds Percy. "Six year-olds don't know what a secret is."

"Yeah, well, I learned that lesson the hard way." He smiles a little, though, because if Noah hadn't said what he did to Annabeth, Percy might not have gotten a second date. Or, at least, not half as easily as he did. They stop where they've parked beside each other, lapsing into a silence that's half-uncomfortable and half-comforting. Percy's not sure where his mind is. "See you on Saturday?" he says, a little hopefully, because they've slowly become his favorite day of the week.

"As always," Annabeth replies, smiling at him.

"I had fun," he continues, shuffling his feet a little. Again, his hands aren't sure where they should be.

She rolls her eyes, leaning up to press a quick kiss to his cheek. "Well, I'm going to leave before this gets any more cliché and cringe-worthy, but you have fun talking about how great the night was."

And, if he has to tell the truth, he wouldn't mind standing there all night staring at the space where she was a few minutes prior, but he should probably get home before his mom starts worrying. So, he gets into his car, tucks the movie ticket into his glove box for safe keeping, and drives home with a smile.

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He does see Annabeth on Saturday, and as soon as she enters, he makes three ice cream cones and decides to take his break.

Noah seems delighted that he gets to hang out with Percy for a little longer than usual, nearly bouncing off the walls with excitement as he fires off questions about Percy's favorite superheroes and other must-knows for toddlers (which, naturally, is just about everything—from mother's name to favorite brand of juice). Annabeth keeps intentionally stepping on his foot every so often, like she wants his attention, but every time he looks at her she just shrugs innocently.

Eventually, Percy decides it's time to clock back in if the growing line is anything to go by—after all, Jason's not quite as talented at making ice cream cones as he is—so he gives Noah a parting hug and kisses Annabeth's cheek before getting back to work. It's comfortable; feels like something that could easily become a tradition. Percy wants to do it every Saturday for the rest of his life.

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It takes him longer than it should to kiss her, probably, since they've known each other for months and have been seeing each other more often than just Saturdays as of late, but he just never felt like there was a good moment to do so. He doubted he was allowed to kiss people while on the clock, and definitely not over the counter while people are waiting to be served as well, so as kissable as Annabeth was at any and all times, Percy knew he would have to wait for a better moment.

Alright, so _maybe _the moment he chooses is kind of a bad one. Whatever, he couldn't care less.

He's just got off work on a Tuesday, being sent home a little early since they were overstaffed and he was the first to volunteer leaving, all other employees wanting their hours. And he's walking down St. George Street, mentally going through his calendar to see if there's any big events he should be shopping for around this time of the year, when he runs into Annabeth. Physically and literally _walks right into her_, just as graceful as always.

Annabeth's on the phone with someone, scowling at Percy before she realizes who it is. Then she smiles, reaching up to hug him, but Percy has other plans, evidently, since he kisses her plum on the mouth.

She makes a surprised, muffled noise against his mouth, pulling the phone away from her ear and pushing at his chest. "Um. Phone. I'm on the phone."

Percy knows. "I know," he tells her.

"Kind of bad timing," she says, sounding a little winded. Percy smiles, because he's the reason.

"I know," he repeats, pressing his lips against hers again.

She reaches up to cradle his jaw, kissing him back very wonderfully and briefly before she shoves him away again. "Leave me alone, I'm on the phone," Annabeth says firmly, bringing it back up to her ear. "Yes, I'm so sorry Mrs. Madeline, I ran into someone."

Percy waits for her to finish the call, staring at her a little more blatantly than he would typically dare, holding her cheek and tapping at her bottom lip with his thumb as if to say _you know we could be kissing right now, but you're talking on the phone, what a shame._ Annabeth seems to get the message, since she cuts Mrs. Madeline off mid-sentence and says, "Can I call you back later?"

And yes, yes, that's good. Percy likes when he gets his way.

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Saturdays are the busiest day of the week for any Kilwin's employee, but it's also Percy's Annabeth day too. He knows when she walks in before he even glances the door, and finds it kind of surreal that he went from being unable to recognize her face to being able to sense

her presence before she's made it known.

And, so what, he kisses her over the counter a few times. Rules are made to be broken.

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End
file.